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Church and Society

A BULLETIN ON SOCIAL QUESTIONS

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This is the first issue of a new Information Bulletin whose purpose it is to give news of ecumenical study and action on Social Questions. The Bulletin is in part a continuation of the former "Information Bulletin on Christian Action in Society", and in part a new effort to provide an ecumenical information service in this area. It is planned to publish the bulletin four or five times a year. In concise form, it will report on the work of the Study Department itself in this area, on the activities of national ecumenical groups, and on publications, conferences, and other items of special importance for our studies. There will be a particular effort to give a truly world-wide view so as to keep Christians interested in ecumenical work on social issues informed about developments in other parts of the world. During this coming year, attention will naturally be focussed in large part on the preparatory work being done in the churches for the Section of the Evanston Assembly dealing with The Responsible Society.

We will welcome your comments and suggestions as to how this bulletin can be made most useful. We will be especially glad to have any material or information from you which could be included in a future issue. Please address your communications to Study Department, World Council of Churches, 17 route de Malagnou, Geneva, Switzerland.

ASSEMBLY PREPARATIONS ON RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY

The leadership in the study preparations for the Assembly Section on The Responsible Society has been taken by a Commission of about twenty members, under the joint chairmanship of Dr. John C. Bennett of the U.S.A. and Dr. C.L. Patijn of Holland. Working with the Secretariat of the Study Department, this Commission, whose membership includes representatives of many countries and confessions and experts in political, economic and social science, has been preparing material for the information and guidance of the delegates to the Assembly and for the wider preparations in the churches at large.

At its ten-day meeting held in August near Geneva, the Commission received the results of an ecumenical survey of recent developments in the churches' social thinking and action around the world. Out of this survey and its discussion of the issues raised there, the Commission prepared a memorandum, designed to stimulate discussion and comment among the churches between now and the time of the Assembly. This memorandum, originally published in the Autumn issue of The Ecumenical Review, is being sent in reprint form as a supplement to this issue of Church and Society.

It will be seen that the memorandum attempts to follow some of the lines which were suggested in the Introductory Leaflet on Social Questions, "The Responsible Society in a World Perspective", published about a year ago. The memorandum is an effort to state positively an approach to the discussion of the problems raised in the earlier leaflet, in the light of the information gathered in the Survey and of the thinking of the Commission itself.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the recent ecumenical studies in the field of social questions has been its revelation of the way in which the churches of the ecumenical movement have sought to relate the tradition of social thinking represented by Oxford and Amsterdam to the rapidly changing world political and economic situation. The increasing interdependence of the world's economic and political life; the changes wrought by the social revolutions under way in many parts of the world; the changing patterns of life in the industrially developed countries; the confrontation with Communism - these, as well as new developments in theology and in the social sciences, have required Christians to take a fresh look at the meaning of "The Responsible Society" in relation to current conditions.

In its memorandum, the Commission has tried to select from among the vast number of social issues those to which it is urged that the churches should give their particular attention before, at, and after Evanston. Some of the major problems raised are as follows:

* The structure of political life: the political responsibility of Christians in relation to existing systems of political institutions, and the criteria by which such institutions should be tested.

* The function of the state in economic life: the special problems raised by the greater function of the state in economic life, the benefits to be derived and the danger of an "all-controlling state".

* Priorities in the economic system: the goals of economic life and the criteria by which the Christian measures the desirability of various economic policies and criticizes tendencies in economic life.

* The role of organised groups: the increased importance of organised social groups in determining the character of economic life and the ways in which such groups can be held responsible for their influence on social issues.

* International economic and social interdependence: the need to test national policies by their effect on other countries, especially the relations between economically developed and underdeveloped countries. (It is pointed out that Christians all over the world must give special attention to the problems facing the Church and Society in Communist lands and also the problems of the underdeveloped countries.)

The preparations for the Evanston Assembly are directed toward trying to understand the meaning of the Christian Hope, particularly as expressed in the work being done on the Main Theme of the Assembly, for these social, political and economic questions. The churches need also to discover the means by which they may most effectively study and act on these problems. In its memorandum, the Commission has tried to deal constructively with these issues. But the purpose of the memorandum is merely to suggest, to stimulate the churches to the discussion of these matters before the Assembly convenes in August 1954. All of the churches are urged to participate in this process. Your comments and viewpoints are essential to the work both at and after the Assembly, and will be gratefully received by the Study Department.

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SOME REGIONAL STUDY PROJECTS ON SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Social Revolution in India

Christians not only in India but elsewhere as well will welcome the thoughtful analysis found in a new book edited by P.D. Devanandan and M.M. Thomas, Communism and the Social Revolution in India: A Christian Interpretation, (Calcutta: The YMCA Publishing House, 1953). There is a careful ideological and historical

treatment of Communism itself, with a special chapter on the history of the Communist Party in India. There is a discussion of the nature of the social revolution in India and the way in which Communism appeals to the ideals of this revolution and then betrays them. Finally, there is a section on the answer of Christianity to Communism, both as a world-view and as a social force, with an attempt also to outline a form of social democracy as a constructive social alternative to Communism.

Perhaps the most important fact which the book shows is that the social revolution in India is not identical with Communism. Too many Westerners these days are prone to interpret every struggle for social justice on the part of oppressed peoples as Communist-inspired. The authors of this book clearly show that in India it is rather the case that it is the aspirations of the peasant, the worker, the student and the intellectual for a more just social order which the Communists have exploited for their own ends, which are precisely the opposite of those of the needed social revolution. The radical incompatibility of Christianity and Communism must lead the Christian to support those desperately-needed social reforms without which Communism can continue to offer its specious promises.

The book contains much useful historical material on Communism in India. The actual electoral weakness of the Communists there may come as a surprise to many Westerners. In the last General Elections, they polled only 5.8% of the votes in the contests for the State Legislative Assemblies, and only 5.1% in those for the House of the People. Nevertheless, Communist strength in strategic areas such as Travancore is very great.

The YMCA Publishing House in Calcutta has also been issuing a series of pamphlets on social concerns. Some of the recent titles are "The Christian and the Communist", "Christian Concern for the Social Revolution" and "Communist Economic Planning and the Democratic Alternative".

American Study Project on Ethics and Economic Life

In 1949 the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America started a study project on "ethical principles for economic life that will be consistent with Christian doctrine", which has been continued under the new National Council of Churches. Three books of the six-volume series have been published this year:

Goals of Economic Life, edited by A. Dudley Ward. Harpers, New York, 1953, 470 pp.

The Organizational Revolution, A Study in the Ethics of Economic Organization, by Kenneth Boulding, with a commentary by Reinhold Niebuhr. Harpers, New York, 1953, 286 pp.

Social Responsibilities of the Businessman, by Howard R. Bowen, with a commentary by F. Ernest Johnson. Harpers, New York, 1953, 270 pp.

The remaining three books, to be published soon, deal with American Income and Its Use, The American Economy and the Lives of People, and Ethics and Economic Life (a summary volume).

This is an important series because of the scale on which it is being carried out and because collaboration between experts in the economic and social fields and theologians is being achieved.

The first volume on the Goals of Economic Life consists of essays by fifteen economists, sociologists, political scientists, lawyers, moral philosophers and theologians on the values and goals of American economic life. Readers will find the essays by the economists J.M. Clark, K.E. Boulding, E. Heimann and W. Vickery, and the theologians J.C. Bennett and Reinhold Niebuhr, especially interesting.

The second book on the Organizational Revolution is a study of the growth of large-scale political, economic and social organizations in modern society and their impact on economic policy and personal conduct. Professor Boulding concludes that the growth and development of such organizations is a regrettable necessity, due as much to progress in the organizing ability of modern society as to the need for such organizations. Professor Niebuhr criticises this judgment, arguing that modern large-scale social organizations are created under the pressure of the need "to balance the unbalanced disproportions of power introduced into modern life by large-scale production and distribution".

The third book on Social Responsibilities of the Businessman is a study of the social responsibilities involved in the operations of the modern American enterprise system, the businessman's insufficient awareness of these responsibilities, and the various proposals for changing business organization and practice.

(Note: As soon as this series is complete the Study Department plans to publish a long review article on these books, outlining the main conclusions for the benefit of those who will not have an opportunity to see the entire set.)

The Christian Responsibility for European Cooperation

The Committee on the Christian Responsibility for European Cooperation is meeting at Lambeth Palace in London on November 5th-8th, to give particular attention to the relations of the United Kingdom to the movement for European unity, as well as to current questions in the European situation generally. The Committee is an independent group of Christian laymen drawn from various European countries and from different fields of social and political life, to develop a Christian approach to the political and economic problems of Europe. Its officers are Professor André Philip of France and Dr. C.L. Patijn of Holland.

In an article entitled "The Search for the New Europe", which will appear in the forthcoming issue of the Committee's bulletin European Issues, J.H. Huizinga, of Holland, offers a revealing account of the progress to date toward European unity, particularly in the Europe of the Six (France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries). He points to the revolutionary implications for European society of the actual decisions which have been taken thus far in the efforts to deal jointly with Europe's political, economic and military problems.

Just now, as the movement has reached a crucial point, it seems also to have come to an impasse, largely due to French indecision. Mr. Huizinga believes that the movement toward unity must now be carried to its logical conclusion, or else collapse altogether: "Either the Six establish a European executive responsible for wielding the instrument of power which they have created by renouncing their national instruments and merging them into a European one, or this revolutionary act will have to be undone."

It is clear from Mr. Huizinga's statement that both now, in the period of uncertainty, and in the future, when the agreements made must be implemented, more are involved than merely strategic considerations. What is being envisioned is a truly European society. At present, many difficulties seem to lie between the vision and its realisation; not the least of these is the necessity to begin to think of Europe as a whole, socially and culturally as well as politically and economically.

The Bulletin also contains statements by Dr. Heinemann and Bishop Dibelius of Germany, and articles by Professor Brugmans of the College de l'Europe (Bruges) and Dr. C.L. Patijn.